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Youth Voters on the Rise

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A recent poll of college students in four battleground states shows that although they are less engaged in the 2008 presidential election than the average American, they are registering to vote at historic levels.

"College students may be less engaged politically than the average American, but the real story here is that they are becoming more engaged than in the past," said Alex Orlowski, 21, a UD senior political science/sociology major who took the poll. "They are starting to care, and they are

starting to catch up."

Orlowski is co-author of *Millennials Talk Politics*, a 2007 national report on college student civic engagement released by the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE). The report found that students are eager to get engaged, but they are ambivalent about formal politics itself, Orlowski said.

CBS News, UWIRE and *The Chronicle of Higher Education* conducted a poll in early October of students from 49 four-year colleges in the battleground states of Ohio, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Colorado. A total of 890 UD students responded to the poll, which also sought students from Wright State University, Miami University, Ohio State University and Ohio University.

The poll showed 51 percent of students overall and 39 percent of UD students said they are paying a lot of attention to the presidential campaign, compared to 65 percent of adults nationally.

The poll also showed 95 percent of students in all the battleground states, including 95 percent at UD, are registered to vote. Of these students, 86 percent said they definitely will vote, many for the first time. Among UD's registered voters, 53 percent said their vote in November will be their first vote, and 21 percent said they voted for the first time during the primaries.

These numbers are encouraging, Orlowski said, because one of the biggest roadblocks to participation in politics has been getting students registered to vote.

Voting statistics show that 48 percent of college students voted in the 2000 election, a number that increased to 60 percent in 2004, according to CIRCLE. If current trends hold, this number is likely to increase again.

"Young people, once registered to vote, are very likely to go and vote — particularly college students," Karlo Barrios Marcelo, a research consultant with CIRCLE, told *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

While overall support for Barack Obama among college students is 64 percent (32 percent for John McCain), UD students support Obama over McCain by a narrower margin of 50 to 46 percent.

The poll found Obama rates more favorably than McCain among college students in every area except on who would make a more effective commander-in-chief.

Obama's popularity with college students is due in large part to his ability to relate to them, Orlowski said. The poll showed 64 percent of the students overall said Obama is someone they can relate to, and 77 percent said they believe he cares about people like them.

"A lot of the frustration with politics among Millennials is that Washington doesn't pay attention to their views and their interests," Orlowski said. "But Obama has tapped into this generation. He's got a Facebook page; he's reaching out to us; he addresses the issues that concern our generation, like education and the economy."

Contrary to the overall college student poll results, McCain and the federal government in general do inspire confidence in a majority of UD students: 51 percent said they believe McCain cares about people like them, compared to 37 percent overall. And 61 percent of UD students believe the federal government cares about their generation, compared to 49 percent of students overall.

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